

Neighborhood Ten Study
Committee Meeting #6
March 24, 2005
Housing

Committee members present: Rebekah Kaufman, Henry Lukas, Joan Marszalek, Chip Strang, Rachel Cobb, John Moukad, Bill Forster, Sandra Uytterhoeven, Peter Hiam, Peter Sturges, Ravi Sundaram

Staff present: Elaine Thorne, Taha Jennings, Chris Cotter, Cassie Arnaud

Housing Discussion:

Chris Cotter and Cassie Arnaud of the Community Development Department Housing Division continued the housing discussion, which began during the previous committee meeting. Cassie gave a brief review of the Housing Division's policies and programs. The committee then had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss housing as it pertains to Neighborhood Ten.

Housing policies and goals

There was some interest on the committee regarding the Housing Division's goals and policies. There were several questions concerning how the waiting list for affordable housing in the City is maintained, how priorities are established, and where people on the list currently reside. A committee member asked if City owned buildings are subject to zoning regulations, also if the Housing Division buys property in order to develop affordable housing. There was a question on whether or not university dormitories are required to provide affordable units through the inclusionary zoning regulations.

There was some discussion on the zoning definition of assisted living and if it includes shelters, halfway houses or transitional housing. Also, if assisted living developments are required to include affordable units. Someone noted that Cambridge seems to carry a large share of the burden of transitional housing. A committee member stated that the committee should think about what assisted living in the neighborhood means.

Neighborhood Ten concerns

There were several questions regarding affordable housing in Neighborhood Ten including, how much is provided, what is an acceptable amount of affordable housing, where the city ranks compared to other communities, where the affordable units in the neighborhood are located, and how many units are in Neighborhood Ten compared to the rest of the City. Someone noted that in Neighborhood Ten, probably less than 15% of the housing units are affordable. Another committee member felt that Neighborhood Ten is the least diverse area of Cambridge because there is less affordable housing compared to other areas. A committee member pointed out that there would be 6 affordable units in the new housing development on Aberdeen Avenue.

There seemed to be a consensus that more affordable housing is needed, however more and more housing may be detrimental to the community. Someone also noted that changing the neighborhood balance could have negative impacts on quality of life issues regarding traffic, parking, garbage, and noise. One committee member stated that they are not opposed to denser uses in residence A1/A2 districts in order to increase the supply of affordable housing in the neighborhood. In particular, the committee discussed changes in zoning, if necessary, to allow in-law or accessory units with the same limits in

terms of use. Someone pointed out that this could be helpful to young residents and families that wanted to stay in Cambridge after growing up in the area. Another committee member stated that these additional units might also help meet affordable housing goals. It was asked if in law apartments would change the character of the neighborhood. Concern was also voiced about “mansionizing” houses. Another committee member questioned whether in law and accessory apartments would actually help to increase the supply of affordable housing in the neighborhood. Most on the committee agreed that there should be a balance between density in the neighborhood and providing affordable housing.

Several committee members wanted to know how the neighborhood could increase affordable housing without changing the zoning significantly. Some committee members further pointed out that zoning was already very restrictive, especially in the Brattle Street area. A committee member suggested a recommendation for mixed-use development at Star Market should redevelopment occur at the site in the future.

Funding

Someone asked about the percentage breakdown of private vs. public funding for the housing programs, as well as how much of the public funding is through federal vs. local sources. There was a question regarding how owners of affordable units are kept from selling the units for a profit.

Market issues

A committee member asked how a generally aging population that seems to be moving back into cities affects housing demand. Another noted that there are many residents in the suburbs that still may not be able to afford a condominium in Cambridge. There were questions on how universities and new residential developments affect the housing market.

Public Meeting Discussion:

Elaine Thorne facilitated a discussion on the format of a public meeting for the Neighborhood Ten Study. It was explained that the purpose of a community wide public meeting is for the Study Committee to get additional information from the general public as it develops recommendations for the neighborhood. The public meeting will be held sometime in early June.

The committee asked what kind of information has been received at public meetings for other neighborhood studies. There was also interest expressed on the committee in discussing some additional issues, in particular, overall neighborhood maintenance, and day-to-day quality of life issues. Other specific issues that came up were the over-taxing of some houses (as two condominiums rather than as a two-family house, especially on Aberdeen Avenue) and what can be done about the loss of Huron Drug in the Huron Village area. Someone suggested coordinating with the Fresh Pond Advisory Group, and possibly other neighborhood groups in Neighborhood Nine and Concord Alewife. There was some discussion on the appropriate outreach for a public meeting. Committee members were supportive of sending and or personally handing out postcards inviting residents of the neighborhood to the public meeting. Committee members also agreed that email was an effective way to communicate information about upcoming meetings. City staff would bring a draft public meeting flyer to review at the next committee meeting.